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USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: ASSEMBLY FINALLY PASSES TURKISH LANGUAGE
AMENDMENT

REF: PRISTINA 781

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Kosovo Assembly passed an amendment to the Law on Languages making Turkish an official language in Prizren. After initially rejecting the measure on September 14 due to infighting within the ruling Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) party, the LDK got its house in order (at least for this vote) after we made clear to Assembly Speaker Berisha and others the amendment's importance to the fulfillment of a key Contact Group standard. Passage is good news, but the difficulty of gaining parliamentary support for a key concern of a pro-Albanian and pro-independence minority does not bode well for the tougher decisions ahead on minority rights. It also highlights the need for party discipline if the Unity Team hopes to deliver rank-and-file support for a status agreement. END SUMMARY.

Not Pretty, But It Passed

12. (SBU) Finally, by a vote of 61 for, seven against and three abstentions, the Kosovo Assembly passed an amendment to the Law on Languages, making Turkish an official language in Prizren and in any area where Turks make up at least five percent of the population. Due to infighting within the ruling Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) party, the Assembly had rejected the measure on September 12 (reftel), a day after visiting EUR DAS DiCarlo had made clear to Assembly caucus heads that passage of the measure supported a key Contact Group standard and, more to the point, protection of minority rights.

13. (C) In the days after the defeat, COM re-affirmed to Assembly Speaker Berisha the importance not only of the amendment's passage but also the need to demonstrate party discipline in implementing standards-related requirements. Berisha then argued in favor of re-introducing the amendment to the LDK caucus on September 21 and got the support he needed, but not without complaints from perennial troublemakers, LDK caucus leader Alush Gashi and LDK Presidency member Sabri Hamiti.

14. (SBU) Gashi, who did nothing to prevent the measure's

earlier defeat, said he would now support it, but only because "the Contact Group requested it." For his part, Hamiti claimed the Assembly could not move forward because of procedural grounds, but that he would now also lend his support, even though "what we are being asked to do is a political issue." With the LDK house now more or less in order, the measure was then brought to the floor and, with the support of other major parties, passed easily.

Comment

¶5. (C) Kosovo's Turkish minority is openly pro-independence and allied to the Albanian majority; its political party is in the governing coalition. Passage of this amendment should have been an easy concession for the LDK caucus. The fact that this measure passed only after considerable international arm twisting -- with us leading the charge -- does not bode well for the Assembly's ability to enact legislation that will be critical to Kosovo's Serbs. We will work continuously to underscore to Assembly and party leaders the need for discipline and seriousness to standards-related legislation as a critical measure of Kosovo's readiness for the status settlement.

¶6. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW